

Augustine, and he continued to villify Chrysostom long after the death of the tragic patriarch. The subject of this new biography is St. Jerome, Bethlehem recluse, and a man of tempestuous passions, who receives sympathetic but critical treatment by the renowned J.N.D. Kelly of Oxford.

Jerome was born in Stridon in Dalmatia around 331 A.D. Kelly is certain of the date and offers an appendix to support it, but others (W.H.C. Frend) place it 15 years later. After receiving an excellent classical education in Rome, he joined monastic houses first in Trier and then in Aquileia, only to leave the latter due to some scandal which details remain unknown. He settled in Antioch for a time with a brief foray into the Syrian desert as a recluse (though his library accompanied him, and he was surrounded by disciples). From 382-385 he was secretary to Pope Damasus in Rome, a period which gave Jerome visibility as a scholar and important contacts which would serve him later. Due to his quarrelsome nature, biting satire, and exaggerated views on virginity, he was forced to leave Rome (he called it "Babylon") and settled in Bethlehem for the rest of his life.

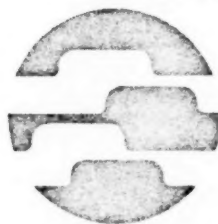
By the time he arrived in Palestine he was already on his way toward a fresh translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew, having earlier completed the four Gospels. Jerome's appreciation for "the Hebrew verity" was singular for his time, and to his credit he persevered in seeking an exact reading of the best available texts even though this practice involved him in acrimonious exchanges with critics, who held on to the Septuagint. To Augustine he wrote that if he didn't like the new translation, he didn't have to read it. Along with his work of translation, which included very large parts of Origen, Jerome commented on all the prophets, four Pauline epistles and Matthew. He wrote numerous polemical pieces and engaged in a very active correspondence (117 letters are extant). His literary style is of high quality, as he wrote everything for publication.

Kelly succeeds very well in guiding the reader through a complex chronology of events, drawing largely on Jerome's letters, his prefaces to commentaries, and letters written to him. This is the first full-scale biography to appear in English, and it will stand for a long time. Church history is not merely biography, but biography is indispensable to understand the struggles of the fathers with the ideological forces which were shaping the Church's theology. Kelly's command of the subject is impressive, and his refined English prose is a pleasure to read.

In some respects this work is distressing, because it serves as a potent reminder that the "early church" was no more pure, perfect, or idealistic than the church in any age. The disgraceful Origenistic controversies, with the duplicity of Cyril, the scurrility of Jerome, and the scrambling of prelates seeking political advantage sounds all too familiar to the 20th century. Even Jerome's name-calling—Rufinus was a "grunting pig," and Pelagius a "big bloated Alpine dog",—finds modern counterparts. But so far no contemporary churchmen have taken such direct action as Pelagius' followers when they invaded Jerome's twin monasteries, pillaged their contents, and burned them to the ground. Despite Jerome's eccentricities, he fully deserves the title of *doctor ecclesiae*, and Kelly's excellent treatment is a fitting monument to his role in shaping Western Christian thought.

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